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RECENT LITERATURE

Cabot, William Brooks. LABRADOR. Boston; Small, Maynard & Co. 8 vo., xiii + 354 pp., illustr., 1921.

A land of great spaces, of windswept hills and strong rivers, of uncounted lakes and uncharted coasts, Labrador is today the only remaining wilderness in eastern North America. That it has been so little visited is due in part to its forbidding aspect, the difficulty of transport, the almost unbelievable multitudes of mosquitoes, conditions which combine to repel the casual traveler. For these very reasons it continues to be the home of a tribe of splendid Indians, the Naskapi, who live their primitive hunter life little touched by the all-destroying white man.

The author tells of a series of summer excursions mainly into the more northern portion along the east coast of the peninsula, partly with a view to geographical work, largely, however, for the study of these same Indians into whose favor he has patiently won his way.

Though chiefly concerned with other things, the book contains many valuable notes on mammals. In especial, the chapter devoted to "Mice" should become a classic to stand with Darwin's bumblebees. The species is apparently the Labrador meadow mouse (*Microtus enixus*). "Like the rabbit it increases in numbers through a term of years and suddenly disappears. . . . In 1903, my first year in the country, mice were not noticeably plenty. Caribou had been abundant through the winter, by early July passing north in large numbers close to the coast. There were some falcons about, the splendid light-colored gyrfalcons, besides rough-legged hawks, dark and almost equally fierce. Both kinds breed in cliffs about the islands. I saw few ptarmigan. . . . Foxes, the most important fur game, were fairly plenty. By 1904 mice were distinctly abundant. Hawks were more numerous, the white ones shrilling from many cliffs as we approached their nests. It was that year, I think, perhaps the next, that foxes were noted by the shore people as being scattered and shy; they would not take bait. . . . Ptarmigan were fairly numerous. The wolverene we shot was full of mice. There were no caribou to speak of. We saw a good many wolf tracks, chiefly along the river banks, where mice are apt to be, but heard no wolves at night. . . . The next year, 1905, was the culminating year of the mice. Sometimes two at a time could be seen in the daylight. Low twigs and all small growth were riddled by them. There was a tattered aspect about the moss and ground in many places not quite pleasant to see. . . . Falcons had increased visibly. . . . Owls were not many, but had increased somewhat; we saw only one snowy owl. All trout of more than half a pound had mice inside. Ptarmigan were very plenty, and the wolves—we may have seen the tracks of two hundred—were silent still. The bear of the trip was full of mice. . . . Caribou were still scarce even on George River, and foxes plenty. In the spring of 1906 the mice disappeared with the snow. . . . With the vanishing of the mice the change in the visible life of the country was remarkable. The falcon cliffs were deserted, coast and inland. . . . We felt the absence of their superb flights and cries. In the trout reaches of the Assiwaban fish were numerous, but they were living on flies now, with what minnows they could get, and were no longer mousey but sweet and good. No owls appeared;

there had, however, never been very many. Our bear of the year was living on berries. . . . Ptarmigan were all but wanting, old birds and young. It is fair to suppose that in previous years they were let alone by their natural enemies in the presence of the superabundant mouse supply, and were enabled to increase to their unusual number in 1905. . . . For the first time we heard the wolves nights, a far, high-pitched howl—their hunting cry. I suppose it is for the ears of the caribou. Uneasy, they move, a track is left for the wolf to find and sooner or later the chase is on. . . . Once the wolves found themselves upon the hard times of early 1906 they may have sought the caribou and started them to move. They certainly did move, as the twelve or fifteen hundred carcasses [killed by the Indians for winter use] at Mistinipi that year went to show.

"The bearing of the mouse situation on the human interests of the region is easy to see. It affected all the game, food game and fur. The abundance of mice tended to build up the ptarmigan, which are of vital importance in the winter living of the Indians through the whole forested area to the Gulf. Likewise it built up the caribou herd by providing easier game than they for the wolves. The departure of the mice did the reverse, reducing the deer and ptarmigan, but it may have brought the deer migration as suggested. . . . Nor were the shore people by any means untouched. All their land game came and went, was plenty or wanting, shy or easily taken, according to the supply of mice. London and St. Petersburg, easily, were affected through their great fur trade." These and other relations in the interdependence of animals are forcefully suggested.

Under the heading "Creature Colorations" are gathered a number of keen observations as to the adaptive significance of the color pattern of certain northern species, including the wolverene, the arctic and varying hares, weasels and ptarmigan. These and numerous other items told in passing constitute all together a valuable contribution to the natural history of the North.

The book itself is attractive to the eye and hand; its story of travel, hardship, and discovery is well and simply told, intimate yet restrained. The spirit of out-doors runs through it all; one comes regretfully to the last page.

—*Glover M. Allen.*

Thorburn, Archibald. *BRITISH MAMMALS.* Longmans, Green, and Co., London. 4 to, Vol. 1, pp. i-viii, 1-84; col. pl. 1-25, line cuts in text, 8. 1920. Vol. 2, pp. i-vii, pp. 1-108; col. pl. 26-50, line cuts in text, 8. 1921.

The purpose of this splendid work as set forth in the preface "has been to provide pictures in colour of all those animals classed as mammals which inhabit or visit our islands." The author includes in this scope the Cetacea, twenty forms in number, making the treatment very comprehensive.

To quote again from the preface: "Planned as a companion to the volumes on 'British Birds' and 'A Naturalist's Sketch Book,' recently published, it gives a series of reproductions from water-colour drawings of the seventy species which make up the list, and in addition to these are shown various subspecies or closely allied forms, among others some of the local races of mice which have attracted the attention of naturalists during recent years." "A short description of the animals represented has been included, giving the general distribution, colour, measurements, and some notes on the habits of the various species, . . ."